



**Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Southern District of Texas**

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TWO MORE CONVICTED FOR ROLE IN SEX TRAFFICKING CASE

HOUSTON, TX – Oscar Mondragon, a 48-year-old Salvadoran, and Kerin Silva, a 19-year-old United States citizen, were convicted today for their respective roles in an organization involved in the sex trafficking of Central and South American females for Houston area bars and restaurants through force, fraud and coercion, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle and Assistant Attorney General Wan Kim of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division announced.

At a hearing this morning before United States District Judge Vanessa Gilmore, Oscar Mondragon, operator of the Mi Cabana Sports Bar located on West Tidwell Road, pleaded guilty to conspiring with his brother, Maximino Mondragon, also known as "El Chimino," Victor Omar Lopez and Walter Corea to recruit and transport women and girls from Central America to travel to the United States with the expectation of legitimate jobs in restaurants, only to hold the women through threats of force to compel and maintain their service as "bargirls" at bars and restaurants in the Houston area until each repaid smuggling and other assessed fees. This trafficking scheme designed to hold the women in a condition of peonage, that is, involuntarily until repayment of a debt, operated for a period of approximately four years beginning in November 2001. The indictment identifies eight women from El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua ranging in age from 16 to 38, who were recruited by one or more of the conspirators and compelled to work as "bargirls" to pay their smuggling fees.

Mondragon acknowledged that while in service to the defendants as bargirls, the women and girls were expected to keep company with the male patrons of the bars and encourage the patrons to buy beer and liquor at high prices. A portion of the price of the beverage would be applied toward the woman's or girl's outstanding debt. Moreover, the women and girls were on occasion required to submit to sexual activity with male bar patrons and favored business associates of the conspirators. The women reported earning between \$500 and \$600 per week selling drinks to male customers, but after paying assessments for a debt that incorporated fees for having been smuggled into the United States, food, housing, clothing, and other miscellaneous items, they received as little as \$50 each week or sank further into debt.

Mondragon conceded he and his brother threatened the girls to maintain them in service, including one instance in which Mondragon angrily told the girls he would kidnap the son of one of the girls who had escaped and if she did not return, then the child would be killed. On another occasion, one of the bar girls overheard Mondragon telling other girls he was going to arrange for a bar girl who was causing trouble to be transported to the border and killed.

In June 2005, Oscar Mondragon negotiated a total price of \$11,000 to sell to another bar owner a 19-year-old Salvadoran and a 16-year-old Salvadoran minor he had recruited but had not yet arrived in the United States for use as bargirls or prostitutes, assuring the buyer that both women

would be accustomed to captivity and discussed the use of coercion to maintain the women in service.

This conspiracy conviction carries a maximum statutory penalty of five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Mondragon also pleaded guilty to and was convicted of conspiring to harbor and transport illegal aliens for commercial advantage and private financial gain, and faces a maximum statutory penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Kerin Silva, son of Walter Corea, also pleaded guilty and was convicted today of conspiring to harbor and transport illegal aliens for commercial advantage and financial gain. Silva acknowledged transporting a group of illegal aliens his father had arranged to smuggle into the United States in November 2004. Silva transported the group to a bar owned by the conspirators in Houston. In late April or early May 2005, Silva transported yet another group of illegal aliens. This group included a female who was subsequently transported to and began working at a Houston bar owned by the conspirators.

Both Oscar Mondragon and Kerin Silva are scheduled to be sentenced on July 24, 2006. Mondragon remains in federal custody without bond. Silva, who was released on bond following his arrest, was permitted to remain free on bond.

The convictions of Oscar Mondragon and Kerin Silva bring the total number of defendants convicted in this case to five. Also convicted for their roles in this trafficking conspiracy are Maximino Mondragon, also known as "El Chimino," the owner of El Potrero de Chimino Bar and La Margarita Restaurant, both located on Hempstead Highway; Walter Alexander Corea, the owner and operator of the El Cuco Restaurant located on West Tidwell Road, and Victor Omar Lopez, all of whom are Salvadoran nationals.

Three women, charged in the indictment, Maria Fuentes, Olga Mondragon, and Lorenza Reyes-Nunez, also known as "La COMADRE," are pending trial in November 2006 and are presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.

Prosecuting the perpetrators of human trafficking crimes remains a top priority of the Justice Department. Since 2001, the Department's Civil Rights Division and the United States Attorney's Offices around the country have charged a total of 297 defendants – 22 in the Southern District of Texas – in cases of human trafficking.

The investigation leading to the filing of criminal charges is the result of a year long investigation conducted by members of the Human Trafficking Rescue Alliance (HTRA) in Houston, Texas, which includes the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO), Texas Alcoholic and Beverage Commission (TABC), and the Constables Offices of Precincts One and Five. Assistant United States Attorneys Ruben R. Perez and Joe Magliolo, and Trial Attorneys Lou de Baca and James Felte with the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, are prosecuting the case.

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